



Photo by ATC Isaac G.L. Freeman

There I

W

hile deployed to Saudi Arabia in support of Operation VIGILANT WARRIOR in 1994, I witnessed a potential mishap involving an explosives operation that I will never forget.

An F-4G weapons load crew was downloading a live AGM-88 HARM from a LAU-118 launcher. If you are familiar with F-4Gs, you know that they are low to the ground and the method of downloading the HARM is to first place a forward track safety pin in the LAU-118 missile launcher, then place the bottom half of the HARM casket under the missile on the ground. The next step is to then straddle the missile between your legs, wrap your arms around it, and interlace your fingers for grip. Then use your whole body to slide the missile forward until stopped by the forward track safety pin.

At this point, the MHU-83 bomb lift truck ("jammer") lifts the bottom half of the casket under the HARM, gently places it in the casket foam, the forward track safety pin is removed, and the missile finally slides completely off the missile launcher.

In this particular instance a weapons flight chief disrupted an explosives operation to his detriment. He was standing in the immediate area watching a download operation and decided he wanted in on some of the "action." He asked the weapons load crew chief if he could slide the HARM himself. The load crew chief agreed and the flight chief straddled the missile, gripped his

fingers under the missile, and "heaved ho" — unfortunately for him, the weapons load crew forgot to install the forward track safety pin. This means nothing was there to restrain the missile from completely separating from the LAU-118 missile launcher. This also meant the missile slid off the missile launcher and fell about 2 feet into the previously placed HARM casket with this flight chief's hands wrapped around the bottom of the large missile.

There was a stunned silence as everyone stood around with open mouths for a split second — then the flight chief's screams broke the silence. There were enough people around to lift the heavy missile up and allow the flight chief to remove his hands. For you see, the missile pinned his hands between the missile and the casket. Fortunately for him, the casket foam cushioned his hands and he didn't suffer any injury. Fortunately for all, the missile fell perfectly into the foam cutouts and didn't strike any hard surfaces on its way down.

What went wrong? The first thing is the weapons load crew chief failed to exercise control over the work environment. He should have cleared the immediate area of any personnel not related to the operation. Second, he should not have allowed anyone, shop chief included, into his explosives operations. All these invited distractions disrupted an explosives operation. As crew chief, you must maintain control and not let outside distractions cause you to make mistakes. Do things by the book, stay focused, and in control at all times! ▶

was ...

By MSgt Tsutomu Aber, Nellis AFB, Nev.